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ABSTRACT

The tremendous growth of the speech and theater program at Montclair State College (New Jersey) over the past six years is partly due to the enthusiasm of both faculty and students toward internships. The benefits of experiential learning, the development of career goals, and the application of classroom theory are three reasons why students are highly encouraged to participate in an internship. There are three particular ingredients that contribute to the success of the internship program: (1) learning the necessary, marketable skills; (2) discovering and using prime locations; and (3) promoting a caring and controlled leadership from faculty members. There are additional factors that allow these three "Ls" to function effectively. One is maintaining effective communication between the "internship triad" of student, faculty advisor, and on-site supervisor. Another is establishing clear expectations and goals before the internship begins. The third is observing firmly established rules and regulations. The program at Montclair also follows selection standards for internship students. Once in the program, students are required to maintain a log of daily works, observations, and reactions; give weekly reports to a faculty advisor; complete assignments appropriate to the job description; and complete a final paper on the experience. They must also develop and write a resume. The interns are frequently overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge they gain, the number of professional contacts they make, and the value of the experience they receive. (NTH)

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MAKING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL:
THE NECESSARY INGREDIENTS

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"Hi, Tom. This is Rosanne calling for my weekly report. I am so excited. You will never guess what happened this week. My on-site supervisor called me in and offered me a full-time job after I finish my internship--and the salary sounds great."

Rosanne Geraci, a recent graduate of Montclair State College, did a full-time internship at Merrill-Lynch in the employee training division. Because Rosanne exhibited excellent skills in organization, communication, and research, her on-site supervisor offered her a position upon the completion of her internship with them; Rosanne decided to accept his offer.

This unique opportunity came about because of the unique program in which Rosanne participated at Montclair State in the Department of Speech and Theater. Rosanne chose the Communication Theory and Practice major in that department because she discovered the unique opportunities the program offers. In the program she saw the three "L's" in operation: learning, location and leadership--all of which offered her the academic preparation she desired. Rosanne saw a chance to learn the marketable skills she wanted, to practice those skills in a location easily accessible to a multitude of businesses, and to receive careful monitoring and guidance through the evident leadership of the faculty.

The carefully-designed program at Montclair State has given other students the same opportunity. Recently, several

graduates have accepted full-time positions at the companies where they interned. These students and the businesses in which they interned are discovering the unique combination of marketable skills that a degree in Communication Theory and Practice offers--and Montclair State is proud to contribute the unique, special ingredients necessary to make a program like this work. The three "L's"--a simple success formula--will be explained in this article along with easy application and adaptation procedures for your program.

Background. Success stories are not a recent phenomena in our department. When the Communication Theory concentration began six years ago, the department was very small. There were only 15 majors that first year. But soon, the excitement about the "happenings" in the department spread. By the third year, the enrollment had almost tripled and the first five interns took positions in local businesses. The number of majors continued to increase until this past year when there were 140 students and a total of 30 interns.

This growing program is partly a result of the enthusiasm both faculty and students show toward internships. Faculty philosophy enforces an experiential learning approach and application to academic theory. Students exhibit an excitement about what they are learning. The intern program assists in bridging the gap between classroom learning and "real world" application. Experiencing the work world while investigating a specific career possibility, the student will have a better idea of

the problems, requirements, and limitations of his/her chosen career.

What about the student who graduates, gets a job, and then decides his/her career choice was not a good one? The internship program is a viable solution to this problem. Student interns, who are unsure about their career goals, are given the opportunity to explore those goals. Karen Kennedy, who interned at a New Jersey Public Relations firm, questioned her choice of a career in public relations. "I never realized that public relations involved so much research. I thought I would get to deal more with people," she stated. Following her internship, Karen finished her last year investigating other careers where she could fulfill her desire to obtain a people-oriented career. Without the internship, Karen would probably have been quite surprised and unhappy in her first job.

The benefits of experiential learning, the development of career goals, and the application of classroom theory are three reasons why our students are highly encouraged to do an internship. Since the intern experience is not actually required, the student must be prepared extensively. Internships are not allowed until the second semester of the junior year which provides ample time for students to mature emotionally and intellectually. During that time, faculty members can evaluate the student on academic achievement, attendance, a sense of responsibility and involvement in and commitment to the major. Once the student has exhibited excellence in these areas, applications

may be submitted to the faculty for review and consideration. Accepted applicants are then trained in resume writing and interviewing with extensive counseling about career goals and internship site-selection. This counseling and close interaction continues once the student begins the internship, thus assisting the student at all levels of the experience.

The "Success" Ingredients

There are three particular ingredients that we think contribute to the success of our program: (1) learning the necessary, marketable skills; (2) discovering and utilizing prime locations; and (3) lending a caring and controlled leadership by faculty members. We call these the three "L's"--learning, location and leadership.

Learning. Marketable skills are of primary importance to college students today. Employers are looking for competence, a sense of responsibility, and efficiency--the necessary skills to create company growth and profit. Majoring in Communication Theory provides a unique opportunity for students to learn about the process of communication--the foundation for being an effective employee. Many businesses flounder because they cannot find enough employees with competent communication skills. Organizations are starving for employees that have a strong sense of commitment and responsibility. Companies have folded because of inefficiency--time is money. Learning effective communication skills can enhance these necessary skills. This scenario of an internship interview will explicate this concept.

An anxious applicant enters the employer's office. The interviewer skims the resume, smiling every now and then. Soon she looks up and says, "Okay, John. The first question I have for you is simple. Just exactly what is communication theory?"

John confidently explains. "Well, communication theory is the study of the process of communication. We learn how to take information, process it, and send messages clearly and accurately, try to reduce and minimize meaning loss. Our program covers all areas of communication--interpersonal, nonverbal, public, group." John pauses, thinks for a moment, and begins again. "Understanding the theories of communication has given me great advantages over the majority of people. Even though people spend most of their time communicating with others, many do not understand the motivation or implications behind the words and expressions used--or how to do it effectively."

Ms. Brent is impressed with John's answer, but still confused. "John, if you are a communication theory major, why do you want to work in public relations?"

John's confidence is high--he knows the answer. "Well, Ms. Brent, communication theory is a generalist major. The program is designed to prepare students for work in all fields that deal with the communication of information. This creates high flexibility in career selection; our student enters public relations, advertising, human resource management, consulting, employee training, education, publication, broad-cast production and management.

Again Ms. Brent seems impressed. She asks John to continue.

"In addition to our major requirements, we are urged to take business, marketing, advertising or journalism courses to create for us a specific focus. These electives develop a strong foundation to complement our communication theory overview."

Ms. Brent extends her hand and offers John the internship.

Scenes like this one occur frequently to the students in our major. They learn the theories of communication which creates for them a broad foundation upon which to draw. The subject matter is not only practical, it's applicable. Studying what we do all the time and getting better at it makes good sense. Classes require students to use reflective thinking processes which create "thinkers" instead of robots. Class exercises, notebooks, writing and projects (oral and written) train students in a variety of communication skills such as organization, information processing, effective visual display of information, effective oral presentations including visual aids, and clarity in writing. Persuasion, Contemporary Public Address, and Senior Career Seminar assist in preparing the student for the professional world. Although our subject matter is unique, so is yours. Discover the special strengths inherent in your discipline and enhance them with reflective-thinking processes. Emphasis on the content is not nearly as important as the

skills you are building--the marketable skills that are yours alone.

Location. Not only does the prime location of Montclair State College assist in making our program successful, but the focus on selecting the "right" location for the student is vital. Montclair State is located just 14 miles west of New York City. The New Jersey public transportation system allows easy accessibility to New York firms. New Jersey itself is also a prime location for offices of many major corporations. This rich resource of businesses provides our program with a large selection of quality on-site locations. Many businesses contact the college with ready-made intern programs just waiting to be filled. Many businesses seem ripe for contact by students to create their own tailor-made intern program. The campus community is also a rich resource you should not neglect. The various offices of information, development, publication, media, student affairs and alumni affairs are clamoring for help and will provide students with a wealth of information and an enriching experience.

More important than where your school is located is where the student ultimately gets placed--the business location in which the internship experience is set is of utmost concern. All on-site supervisors should be met in person and the physical conditions of the facility should be evaluated. Primary to the acceptance of the location should be the job description which should be required of the on-site supervisor. The faculty

advisor then needs to evaluate the learning potential that each location can offer. In addition, the location needs to match the student. Some students would sink in a competitive, high-pressured advertising firm in New York City; others would thrive. A careful match on student to location is vital for a positive intern experience.

Leadership. The type of leadership exhibited by the faculty is a delicate ingredient in the "success" mix. For most students, an internship is a frightening experience, a fear to which most will not admit. The faculty advisor needs to give "care-full" guidance so the student knows that he/she has a friend to call on when in trouble. This caring, friendly attitude allows the student to feel confident outside the ivory tower. A firm hand is needed along with this caring approach. Students need to know the rules and regulations of the internship program you run and they need to treat it like a "real" job. Consequently, it is necessary to set up certain, specific rules for the intern to follow. This "tough love" approach provides the student with the leadership necessary to have a positive intern experience.

As the student plunges into the internship experience, the faculty advisor becomes a part of that experience. Together they design projects and papers to augment the internship. Problems are met together and the special support needed by the student is provided for by the developing friendship. Student and program are monitored carefully through weekly reports

called in by the student. "Monday monitoring" becomes a special time of sharing and discussing. From the initial idea of doing an internship to the final grading of the experience, the faculty must exhibit caring and directive leadership.

So the key ingredients to make your program successful are the three "L's": learning the necessary, marketable skills; selecting the prime locations; and exhibiting "tough love" leadership. But there are many other factors of a general nature that seem to contribute to any internship program success. These factors allow the three "L's" to function effectively.

Supporting Factors

One such factor is effective communication between the "internship triad:" student, faculty advisor, and on-site supervisor. Students should be encouraged to communicate openly and directly with their on-site supervisor. Many times students are intimidated by the importance and status of their supervisor and will hesitate to ask questions. Students should be taught that there is no such thing as a dumb question--asking questions is a sign of intelligence. Supervisors should be encouraged to talk daily with their intern and to use specific task assignments that allow the student to exhibit autonomy and responsibility. They need to be reminded that as an on-site supervisor, they are acting as mentors and need to think of themselves as teachers and trainers. Supervisors should know that advisors are available for help but will stay out of the way for the most part. Faculty advisors need to remember that it is ultimately their

responsibility to coordinate the "triad" effectively by promoting frequent and accurate communication.

Clear expectations and goals need to be established in the beginning. Many misconceptions and misguided expectations can exist for the student and the on-site supervisor and these need to be clarified BEFORE the experience begins. If they become unfocused during the experience, they need to be clarified again. Verbal discussions between student and advisor will help to focus some goals and expectations. Students need to hear what a day might be like in their chosen company. Sometimes students create more glamor and excitement than the job deserves and look at their career with "rose colored glasses." Realistic descriptions of job situations need to be described and perhaps experienced on a one-day visit. On-site supervisors need to have realistic pictures of student capabilities and skills. Maturity levels need to be discussed and differences between academia and business worlds need to be explained. Most importantly, specific goals and objectives need to be written down with specific assignments identified, both professional and academic. Explaining all of this more than once doesn't hurt.

Firmly established rules and regulations are necessary to operate any program. Copies of these should be provided for the student and the on-site supervisor. Oral explanation of these guidelines is essential. Some important ones that we have found to be necessary include: (1) weekly phone calls from the student to the faculty advisor; (2) a minimum requirement for grade point average; (3) mandatory attendance; (4) a daily log to record

time, work, observations, and reactions; and (5) preparation of a resume and cover letter for the job. These rules and regulations and any others you find necessary should be carefully enforced in order to maintain quality and to assist in creating a positive experience for the intern.

Program Description

If it's the basic "success" ingredients we have just described that are combined to make any program effective, it is the specific program criteria implemented that are responsible for individual success. We have found some specific criteria that are efficient and effective in our program at Montclair State for the Communication Theory major. The criteria are threefold: (1) meeting selection standards; (2) completing the written contract, specifying academic and professional requirements; and (3) writing the resume.

Selection Standards. In order to be considered for an internship, students must make an application to the faculty and establish proof of how they meet the five standards for selection. Students receiving negative reservations from faculty members are disallowed from participating in the intern program. High standards of quality are maintained through adherence to the carefully selected criteria. Rejected applicants may reapply after correcting their deficiencies.

The five standards for selection include:

1. maintenance of a 3.0 GPA in major courses and a minimum of a 2.5 GPA overall,

2. a 95% attendance record in major courses,
3. a record of NO incompletes in academic courses,
4. the successful completion of five prerequisite courses in the major, and
5. acceptance by departmental faculty through their subjective evaluation of the applicant's professionalism, dedication and maturity.

The student intern is considered a representative of the department and of the college. ONLY students that have demonstrated excellence, enthusiasm, serious intent, ambition and professionalism are selected. Receiving an internship position is a privilege that not all students receive. Professionalism is demanded.

Written Requirements. The student's responsibilities both academically and professionally must be written in contract form to establish firmly the requirements for the semester. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of this criterion. Major problems can and will develop if specific guidelines are not put in writing for the internship triad. This written contract is signed by the student, the faculty advisor, and the on-site supervisor. It acts as the course syllabus which establishes the criteria for successful completion of the course.

We have found that certain academic assignments work well for the intern experience. These assignments allow student autonomy while creating written evidence for evaluation of the experience. The four academic requirements are:

1. a daily notebook log which records daily work, describes daily observations, reactions to daily observations, collects printed materials and work assignments, and explains theory/practice applications,
2. weekly oral or written reports to faculty advisor,
3. appropriate academic reading and/or special projects related to the job description, and
4. an 8-10 page academic paper processing the learning experience.

The student intern must also complete the professional requirements created by the on-site supervisor. These requirements are also written into the contract in the form of a job description. The faculty advisor has the responsibility of monitoring the job description before, during, and after the internship. Job descriptions should be specific and should outline the student tasks, goals and responsibilities; ambiguity should be clarified by the faculty advisor for the student through the on-site supervisor. "Slave labor" is not allowed and should be carefully monitored. Discussion of the job description should occur between all members and all combinations of the internship triad to ensure understanding. Emphasis on how the job description matches learning objectives should be carefully monitored by the faculty advisors.

If the procedure is followed accurately and the academic and professional assignments are met, the student will have a stronger chance of having a positive and rewarding experience.

Twice during the semester, the faculty advisor should visit the intern and meet with him/her and the on-site supervisor-- together and alone. These meetings provide the faculty advisor with evaluation insight on the student's progress, the on-site supervisor/student relationship, and the match between the written contract and the "live" experience. Following these meetings, the faculty advisor can adjust assignments and assist in refocusing the academic and professional requirements.

Writing the Resume. A vital aspect of the required criteria includes the ability to and the process of writing a resume. When going through the process of writing their own resume, students discover much information about themselves, especially about goals and objectives. They also discover what they can do (their marketable skills) and what their experience demonstrates (their developed talents). The ability to create a resume is necessary to the skill of displaying who you are visually and poignantly. Being able to display information, especially about yourself, in an effective manner is a skill that students can discover through writing their own resume. There are multiple commercial resources for this assignment and the academic advisor can be of invaluable help through focusing the student on their "hidden" talents.

Conclusion

The principle priority of the internship program is to provide the student with a valuable learning experience that will potentially create individual growth and awareness for that

student. Interns quite frequently are overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge they gain, the number of professional contacts they make, and the value of the experience they receive. To conclude we have selected two student testimonials which describe their personal experience as recent interns.

Rosanne Geraci/Merrill Lynch/Employee Training Division.

"Doing an internship is an enlightening experience. I certainly had my eyes opened. You find out about a field that interests you and you gain knowledge that could change your plans for the future. The requirements force you to process and focus your experience. I could have easily just come here to work and not even thought about what I was learning--you can really get caught up in the corporate world and forget about academia. That's alright except that processing what you have done through the written assignments teaches you what you have learned. My internship at Merrill Lynch gave me confidence AND a job offer. Don't pass up an internship experience. Mine changed my life!"

Barbara Adamus/Montclair State College/Office of Publication/Editorial Assistant. "I loved my job! The crucial factor that made my internship successful was my on-site supervisor. I established a relationship with her based on trust and confidence. She allowed me the autonomy to work on my own while establishing the climate of acceptance--I knew I could go to her if I had trouble with an assignment. My academic advisor explained to me the importance of trust; once your employer trusts you, you have the potential for a more valuable experience. Of the written assignments, the daily notebook log

was the most valuable to me. It allowed me to incorporate the theory I had learned in my classes into the experience I had in my internship. Although the work is difficult, both academically and professionally, the whole experience is really worth the effort. You can't buy the experience I received!"

Final Note. Our program at Montclair State has grown rapidly; we attribute this growth to the three "L's" of our "success" ingredients, the supporting factors that complement those ingredients, and the specific criteria that we have found to create a smooth mixture of the ingredients. More information can be obtained by writing:

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